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RATIONALE FOR A CULTURALLY BASED PROGRAM OF ACTION AGAINST POVERTY AMONG NEW YORK PUERTO RICANS.

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THE WRITER TOOK THE POSITION THAT ANY ACTION PROGRAM TO CHANGE THE POVERTY CONDITIONS OF NEW YORK CITY PUERTO RICANS SHOULD BE BASED ON KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR CULTURAL LIFE. THERE EXISTS AMONG PUERTO RICANS A SENSE OF ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION AND UNITY WHICH AFFECTS THEIR BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE LARGER COMMUNITY. ONE FACTOR WHICH FIGURES IMPORTANTLY IN NEW YORK CITY PUERTO RICAN CULTURE IS THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL DUALITIES, WHICH ARE A RESULT OF THE STRESS OF ADAPTATION FROM THE ISLAND TO THE MAINLAND CULTURE. FOR EXAMPLE, ALTHOUGH THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP STILL IS A STRONGLY EXTENDED NETWORK OF KINSHIP WHICH OFFERS A SENSE OF MUTUAL OBLIGATION, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SEXES HAS BECOME MORE EQUALITARIAN, AND CONFLICT HAS ARISEN BETWEEN THE ELDER'S CULTURALLY ROOTED BELIEF IN HIS OWN SELF-WORTH, DESPITE HIS REALISTIC AWARENESS OF HIS DISADVANTAGED POSITION, AND THE ADOLESCENT'S FEELING OF POWER IN THE FAMILY BECAUSE OF HIS BETTER EDUCATION. AN ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE PUERTO RICAN'S BEHAVIOR, ESPECIALLY IN HIS FEELINGS ABOUT DISCRIMINATION, IS HIS COMPLEX RACIAL ATTITUDE. IF PUERTO RICANS CAN BE MADE TO FEEL THAT THEIR CULTURE IS RECOGNIZED AND AFFIRMED, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THE IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP TO BRING ABOUT THE NECESSARY CHANGES TO REMOVE THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY IN THEIR COMMUNITY. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE PUERTO RICAN FORUM, OCTOBER 1964. (EF)

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Rationale for a Culturally Based Program of Action Against Poverty Among New York Puerto Ricans

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To the poor, salvation is offered frequently and in many guises. For this and other reasons the announcements of major governmental actions such as the Johnson administration's War on Poverty tend to rouse the enthusiasm of professionals and community leaders concerned with social reform well before they overcome the ingrained skepticism or indifference of the poor themselves. Puerto Rican leadership in New York City has responded with special readiness to the most recent federal anti-poverty legislation because the guiding concepts of the new programs apparently present a unique opportunity to exploit and develop the particular strengths of the Puerto Rican community in fighting poverty and, at the same time, to attack some of the major barriers to the group's emergence as an effective actor in the city's affairs. Among these barriers has been the lack of full-time, professionally staffed, and adequately financed agencies with a priority interest in Puerto Rican problems. But the attractiveness of the new legislation does not lie so much in the possibility it offers of creating necessary organizational resources but primarily in the broad way it conceptualizes the nature of poverty in the United States and the scope of counter-action it envisions. In short, taken at face value, the principles that have been enunciated in relation with the new programs imply a complete shift in government thinking about "welfare" and the realities of the situation of low-income families. These ideas square substantially with the thinking of many members of the Citizen's Committee presenting this proposal.

Perhaps because of the particularities of the Puerto Rican migration--its special history and the singular nature of the receiving environment--Puerto Ricans in New York City have been uniquely conscious that the problems of being poor in the United States involve much more than the incapacity to earn a living wage. The Puerto Rican migrant to New York by no means lacked experience with poverty. In fact, the protest of Puerto Ricans in the city has often been met with derision precisely because some mainlanders believe that no matter how degrading the circumstances of life may be in New York they excel by far the island

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standards to which the migrant is habituated. But for the migrant, moderate and even substantial gains in salary as in other material aspects of living, have often been accompanied by new and even more destructive forms of impoverishment than he knew on the island. The city, the migrant discovers, emancipates slowly and selectively. New York opens the way to certain forms and limited degrees of economic, political, and intellectual liberation; at the same time the city harbors a sub-culture of misery that is not far removed in pattern from that of the underdeveloped world.

The great departure from convention in the new legislation is that for the first time official welfare ideology takes open note of the fact that poverty is more than a distressing symptom of individual failure on transitory economic dislocations. Poverty is acknowledged to be part of a larger structure. The poor are not all incapable, inferior, feebly motivated, infirm, or criminal. The self-defeating behavior of the poor is not ignored, but attention is diverted from the client poor to the total social situation that defines and perpetuates their condition. Levels of poverty are linked to the capacity of the national and regional economies to provide full employment at adequate income levels, but being poor is seen as a complex condition that impinges on every aspect of the individual's life. Because there is a culture of poverty that shapes personality and reaches into job behavior, family structure, community and political action, all of these are legitimate and vital concerns of programs to combat poverty. Because the culture of the poor is embedded in a larger system including actors whose behavior may be more decisive than that of the poor themselves in establishing the conditions of poverty, it is also vital and legitimate to fight poverty not only by spending public funds on the poor but by dedicating part of such funds to work among the non-poor--employers, landlords, educators, government officials, politicians, labor leaders, and others whom the poor accept as leaders. Because the poor have the capacity to help themselves through the exercise of organizational, political, and social skills, they are to be mobilized and actively incorporated into the planning and execution of programs for self-help.

Such general propositions have set the stage for the national offensive on poverty. The major impulse behind this offensive is a simultaneous coming to grips with the two principal sources of inequality in the United States--poverty and race. Why, as this proposal will seek to demonstrate, is it necessary or

useful to consider separately the problem of Puerto Rican poverty in New York within the context of local efforts under this program? If the war on poverty seeks more complete integration on the basis of a humane understanding of what equality means for all Americans, why accentuate ethnicity in actions designed to erase the differences that divide the nation and the city? Would it not be preferable to mobilize all possible resources to erase the vestiges of Puerto Rican culture that impede the full assimilation of migrants and their offspring into U.S. life? Will not such ingenuously benevolent programs merely attract more migrants from the island to the city, multiplying present difficulties? Hasn't too much already been done to accommodate the Puerto Rican newcomer? Does the city risk creating a permanent dependent class of unproductive citizens with a high demand for services?

Useful answers to these questions can only flow from more precise knowledge regarding the life situation of the city's Puerto Rican poor, an informed understanding of the nature of the cultural bonds that sustain a sense of community among Puerto Ricans, and a recognition of the opportunities that this ethnic identification offers for programmed social action. The various parts of this proposal lay the bases for proper replies to this set of questions; a summary of the main answers will be given briefly here.

1. Among the ethnically identifiable groups in New York City, Puerto Ricans are the most disadvantaged in terms of income. More than half of the Puerto Ricans in the city belong to families with incomes below federally established subsistence standards.[1] More than for any other group, this poverty strikes at the life chances of children and youth, for the poverty of Puerto Ricans is that of large families.
2. It has proven difficult to accurately predict the volume of migration from the island to the city over the last decade. Net migration from the island has diminished recently and may have a negative value in 1964. However, about 50,000 migrants still leave for the mainland each year. The total

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[1]Details of income and unemployment are given in the statistical section of this proposal.

number of Puerto Ricans in the city may not be much affected by migration in the next few years, but newcomers will continue to replace those who leave the city.[2]

3. Though assimilation is in many cases rapid and some migrants and their children quickly shed the Spanish language and Puerto Rican ways, those who need help most (more recent arrivals, the poorer, less educated, least skilled) are most closely bound to the island culture and its New York expressions. A substantial proportion of Puerto Rican families seem likely to remain for a long time to come within the current definitions of poor or substandard income families, and it is for these families that the Puerto Rican identification has most vital meaning.
4. The impact of the cultural dislocation attendant on migration is the source of grave inter-generational conflict within Puerto Rican families and is producing considerable confusion and insecurity among Puerto Ricans of all ages who find themselves imperfectly integrated in each of two seemingly incompatible systems. Unless concrete steps are taken to structure the migrant's experience in the city in a way that builds on his culture instead of destroying it, he is likely to remain permanently locked in a position of disadvantage with respect to jobs and education.
5. Existing public and private agencies consistently report inability to reach or effectively serve Puerto Rican clients because of culturally derived misunderstandings or difficulties of communication. Future programs undertaken without direct provision for the specific demands of work among this large sector of the city's poor can anticipate the same kind of failure. (Many of the major modifications in program proposed by Mobilization for Youth after two years of field experience were designed to adjust to the special needs of Puerto Ricans in their area.[3])

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[2]See A.W. Maldonado, "The Puerto Rican Tide Begins to Turn," New York Times Magazine, September 20, 1964.

[3]Mobilization for Youth, "Action on the Lower East Side," Progress Report and Proposal, July '62 - June '64.

6. One of the major needs of the Puerto Rican community is for leadership from among its own ranks. That leadership must come disproportionately from among the young since the distribution of educational achievement is heavily skewed in favor of the young. At the same time the only basis for defining a Puerto Rican community in New York is cultural. Thus the only way to motivate and prepare young Puerto Ricans to effectively contribute services and provide leadership for their own group is by affirming and strengthening their ethnic identification.
7. In New York, ethnically based organizations are most widespread and most powerful not among newcomers but among those who have already achieved a high degree of cultural integration. The historical importance of ethnic community organizations as instruments for the successful adjustment of new groups to the complexities of life in New York is well established.[4] The present and growing level of organization among Puerto Ricans in the city foreshadows a parallel evolution of organizational capacity rooted in the ethnic identification. The essential motivational and organizational power for self-directed change must be sought within groups such as these.

The new attack being mounted on poverty in the city must thus count on a powerful and specifically Puerto Rican component because such action is at once indispensable and practicable. To ignore or fight against the presence of a defined set of ethnic loyalties and values among the city's poor would be to accentuate the personal and social disorganization and alienation the program

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[4] "The development of fully functioning ethnic communities served those who needed help with specific problems and relieved the state of part of the burden of welfare work. It also furnished the individual with a medium through which he could understand the difficulties of the strange society around him and relate himself meaningfully to it. The ethnic community supplied its members with norms and values and with the direction of an elite leadership. It not only assisted them in dealing with their own problems and in adjusting to the conditions of American life, but also gave them a pattern of acceptable forms of action and of expression, connected with the forms of the larger society about them, but integrated in a context intelligible in their own lives." Caroline F. Ware, Greenwich Village, 1920-1930 quoted in Oscar Handlin, The Newcomers, New York: Doubleday, 1959, p. 40.

seeks ultimately to combat. The proportion of Puerto Ricans on the city's welfare rolls has been extremely modest in terms of the actual levels of poverty experienced by island migrants in the city. The pattern of adjustment has been far more typically that of a continued struggle against great difficulties than of a passive acceptance of defeat or a permanent dole. There is no reason to believe that convincing opportunities for self-help will elicit a dependency that has not manifested itself in earlier situations. Puerto Ricans will integrate more readily, with less damage to themselves, and greater advantage to the rest of the New York community if the process can be made affirmative of both Puerto Rican and mainland values, a genuine adjustment rather than a simple capitulation.

The Uses of Culture

To understand the nature of the confrontation between island and mainland cultures being played out in New York it is necessary to look back to the island, for it is there that this confrontation began almost seven decades ago and perhaps where the principal action in the drama is still to unfold. The Puerto Rican migrant, unless he comes to New York as a pre-school child, has had his earliest experiences with the cultural dualities to which he must accommodate in the island setting.

Culture is in part conscious creation and in part the product of processes that are imperfectly understood and only marginally manipulable. The desire or felt need to have a culture does not produce one nor impede the growth and diffusion of cultural forms that no one wants or foresees. Part of the Puerto Rican dilemma has for a long time been the search for a distinctive cultural identity that would lend unifying vitality and meaning to collective life. The passionate pursuit of a uniquely Puerto Rican cultural ideal by some thoughtful Puerto Ricans has not produced any clear-cut cultural configuration that can unerringly be identified as island bred nor has it impeded the disordered impact of powerful outside influences on island lifeways. But Puerto Ricans, even before the American presence, sought to define and defend against outside pressures those features of island life that they felt to be particularly expressive of their own identity. In this regard it is worth remembering that Puerto Rico remained a Spanish dominion for nearly one

hundred years after the wars of liberation in most other dependencies of the Spanish Empire in America had begun. In that last hundred years the importance of the tiny outpost was magnified, and island leaders grew in assertiveness. In 1895 Muñoz Rivera declared that Spain mistakenly saw Puerto Rico as having no culture of its own but only "as a factory with the pretentiousness to aspire to citizenship."[5] According to a notable contemporary, Eugenio de Hostos, the beginning evolution and assertion of a distinctive culture in Puerto Rico during those years of vigorous development was viewed in Spain as subversive and a threat to the mother country.[6]

Once the U.S. took possession of the island, the problem became further complicated by the clash of two disparate cultures and the troubling question of the political status of the island. Questions of cultural and political nationalism became hopelessly intertwined. The early argument that anything short of complete independence would mean cultural suicide gave way before the realization that independence would not halt the intermingling of the two cultures in Puerto Rico. By the 1950's the issue was being posed by island leaders as much interms of cultural survival as in terms of the need for a conscious drive to formulate and strive for an explicit cultural ideal. "If we are not westerners with Puerto Rican roots," declared Governor Muñoz Marin, "we shall be westerners without roots."[7] But anthropologists already saw Puerto Ricans in the mass as part of a general, Western European cultural family, with few distinctive marks of their own. A full-scale portrait of the island culture published in 1956 and based on a massive accumulation of historical and contemporary materials concluded that Puerto Ricans could not be distinguished in terms of national character from other people of the western world.[8] As one observer put it, Puerto Rican culture had become universal by default, by its

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[5]Quoted in Revista del Instituto de Cultura de Puerto Rico, 1959, No. 4.

[6]Geigel Polanco, Vicente, La independencia de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras: Imprenta Falcon, 1943.

[7]Muñoz Marin, Luis, La personalidad puertoriqueña, Speech before the General Assembly of the Teachers Association, December, 1953.

[8]Steward, Julian (ed.), The People of Puerto Rico, Urbana Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1956.

lack of identity.[9]

The problem of culture building and personal identity remains subtly linked to the question of political status even though politically organized pro-independence sentiment has dwindled into insignificance as a voting force.[10] The indefinition of status has posed problems for educational policy. For what kind of political future should Puerto Ricans be educated? If as seems to be the case in many developing nations, there are some fairly direct links between the integration of individual personality and the coherence, degree of autonomy, and social effectiveness of national systems, where is a stable political anchorage for notions of self-worth to be sought for Puerto Ricans? Architects of the Commonwealth themselves see it as an imperfect and temporary arrangement. The achievement by the island of the status of a global U.S. showcase for development is gratifying and inspiring to many but also dramatizes the island's dependency in various ways.

The hard choice facing Puerto Ricans has been between economic survival and the moral and emotional values of political and cultural independence. If Puerto Rico has succeeded in bypassing a possibly destructive nationalism, it has been largely on the basis of appeals to economic realism. The overpowering arguments against independence as well as statehood are economic. Pitted against the desire for economic security, technological advancement, higher standards of consumption, education, health, and many other socially utilitarian goals has been the opposing pull of patriotic sentiment, the impulse toward self-fulfillment in full autonomy and freedom, however risk-laden. The point here is not to review the controversy about the island's political status but to recognize (1) that the desire for a full measure of self-government has not been held just by a few extremist malcontents or cranks, enemies of the United States, and (2) that an unreckoned psychological cost has been paid for the lack of a unified and affirmative sense of who Puerto Ricans are as a political and cultural entity. Recently, there has been some brave talk on the island about the felicitous fusion of old world values with U.S. activism and pragmatism, but the latent current of frustration, anxiety and the sense of displacement among Puerto

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[9]Fernandez Mendez, Eugenio, La identidad y la cultura, San Juan: Ediciones el Cemi, 1959.

[10]Between 1952 and 1960 the Independence Party vote dropped from 126,000 to 24,103. During the same period the Statehood Republican vote grew from 85,000 to 252,364. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Office of the Commonwealth, Washington, D.C., 1961.

Ricans is apparent in many ways.[11]

In short, Puerto Rican culture on the island is beset by many of the same powerful ambivalences and disruptive currents that work on the migrant to New York. The migrant traffic back and forth is one more element behind the accelerated penetration of mainland culture on the island. To this must be added the growing influx of tourists and business people, the ever larger number of Puerto Ricans who take their higher education in United States colleges and universities, the thousands of youths in military service, the increased circulation of English language mass media (especially movies and magazines and more recently television), as well as the effects of growing industrialization. To all of these forces island intellectuals counterpoise a self-conscious nativism or criollismo, a new interest in the island's past, a revival of interest in earlier musical and poetic forms, and creative efforts to combine old and new in contemporary art, literary, and dramatic representations. But while they cast about for means of defense and ways to salvage valued symbols and institutions on the island, they counsel the migrant to the mainland to "assimilate" in all haste.[12] They forget the lesson of their own experiences: that a culture cannot be built or tailored neatly to some preconceived plan and that one cannot simply walk away from or shed an inherited culture like an outmoded suit of clothes.

Much has been written connecting the great post-war migration to New York with economic conditions on the island and in the city. It is worth noting that this massive movement of people also coincided with the real moment of capitulation with respect to aspirations for independence. The years since 1945 have seen the unfolding of a political transformation in which Puerto Ricans after nearly half a century of restiveness and disaffection actively embraced the U.S. citizenship that had been theirs by Congressional fiat since 1917 and committed themselves to a permanent association with the U.S. Those

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[11] Commonwealth advertising to attract investors tends to stress this theme. Island leaders interviewed in a recent study also alluded frequently to these ideas, but the investigator found a great deal of defensiveness and ambivalence regarding the happiness of the union between U.S. and Hispanic elements in the culture. Theodore Brameld, The Remaking of a Culture, New York: Harper, 1959.

[12] Both Muñoz Marin and Fernandez Mendez in the works cited earlier advise the migrant to assimilate. Fernandez Mendez cautions migrants to "avoid forming an ethnic cyst" in New York.

who crowded onto the piers and runways for the trip north were only the most visible actors, executing for all to see the symbolic journey which all on the island in some fashion began to travel in those years.

The trip by sea and air from San Juan was not as full of hardship as that of some earlier Old World immigrants, a fact noted with irritation by second and third generation descendents of those earlier travelers. No Puerto Rican lived more than twenty miles from the sea; the farthest the migrant lived from the great port of exit, San Juan, was some seventy miles. There were no wearying and dangerous overland treks to reach the sea, no consular officials to be placated, no long probationary wait for citizenship.[13] But behind the readily verbalized goals of migration--better jobs, more money, more freedom, the desire to be close to relatives who had gone before--lay complex and unarticulated hopes and fears.[14] There lay the foreknowledge of second rate status and the encounter with forms of prejudice with which they had no experience. If on the island it could be said that Puerto Ricans were a people menaced by their history and uncertain of the future, [15] in the mainland context the Puerto Rican had no projection whatever as an actor in the national past and only vague intimations of a possible role in the future.

The inability of the anthropologists to locate the essence of island cultural distinctiveness and the self-doubts of intellectuals, of course, had not kept Puerto Ricans from feeling strongly Puerto Rican, even if practically everything in the culture was borrowed or imposed from abroad except the most intimate folk symbols and the sense of a shared past. Moreover, any doubts Puerto Ricans may have harbored about their "differentness" were quickly dissipated on arrival in the United States. Even a cosmopolitan city like New York, long inured to the existence of ethnic slum ghettos was shaken by the invasion of Caribbeans calling themselves U.S. citizens. Whatever the cultural amalgam

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[13]For a graphic description of the hardships of travel of earlier immigrants see Oscar Handlin's The Uprooted, Boston: Little, Brown, 1951.

[14]Rosario, Charles, "La emigración como experiencia vital," La Torre, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Vol. IV, No. 13, Enero-Marzo, 1956. This entire issue is dedicated to immigration problems.

[15]Fernandez Mendez, Eugenio, op. cit.

was that Puerto Ricans carried with them from the island, it was experienced by New Yorkers as alien and disturbing.

The dual process of cultural attrition and reaffirmation continued in New York. A sharpened sense of identity came naturally to many from an initial protective clustering, was partly imposed by hostile rejection, or by the matter-of-fact ethnic labelling that goes in New York with the easy presumption that almost everything about human behavior or life in the complex New York community has at root some simple ethnic explanation. As experience was gained and contacts broadened the prevalent model of powerful ethnic community organizations in the city was observed and imitated, with moderate but encouraging success. The Office of the Commonwealth in New York served as a major source of services, as a focal voice for the community during the years when it was the principal organized Puerto Rican entity in the city, and as an informal clearing house for community organizations as these grew in number and resources.

Individual success in adaptation outside the Puerto Rican milieu and the pressure of mainland prejudice and invidious stereotyping led some Puerto Ricans to disassociate themselves from the ethnic community. Much has been made in most of the commentaries, anthropological and journalistic, about New York Puerto Ricans of the fact that some Puerto Ricans call themsleves "hispanos" in certain circumstances. This is taken usually as evidence of the readiness of Puerto Ricans to mask their shame-laden origins even through such transparent circumlocution. No doubt such evasions reflect in some the insecurity and self-hatred that psychologists tell us afflict individuals who experience prejudice, derogation, or inferior status over long periods. But the usage dates back to the pre-war and early depression years when Puerto Ricans were in fact but a part of the larger Hispanic community in the city. To some extent it was also an accommodation to the limited geo-political awareness of many mainlanders. Until the Puerto Rican presence in the city crowded its way into the general consciousness, the island was a possession so remote and inconsequential that few even recognized its name.

In any case, by the early 1960's Puerto Rican organizations were discussing whether to formally recognize in their names the fact that there were non-Puerto Rican "hispanos" among their numbers and ordinarily deciding to use the plain designation of Puerto Rican. The ethnic identification had begun to provide

modest premiums in opportunities for jobs, prestige, and power at the middle levels of the city's organizational life. In short, as in the case of most ethnic minorities that came before, the passage through the melting pot seemed to be leading toward a reaffirmation of the group's individuality.[16] The quest for identity and achievement had been transferred to a new setting and had begun to acquire some intellectual consistency. Puerto Ricans in New York still looked back to the island in efforts to locate themselves meaningfully in the past, but their commitment was to the city. Another episode in the islanders' long struggle to escape insignificance and establish a distinctive group character had begun to unfold.

The New York Puerto Rican

The anthropologists who studied Puerto Rican culture on the island did not deny that there existed elements of a true cultural nationalism rooted in a common emotional response to certain symbols together with a sense of common past and destiny. They tried to say gently that while from a certain level of abstraction the culture of Puerto Ricans had the appearance of an improvised patchwork, this somehow didn't mean that there was no working affective unity giving Puerto Ricans a genuine sense of community. They did note, however, that distinctions based on class were in many particulars more significant than the common patterns. Each class in the local system, they remarked was quite differently affected by the impact of a powerful foreign culture.[17] Middle and upper class islanders were far more likely to have assimilated a variety of U.S. customs and values than the poor, especially the rural poor. The rural jibaro is, of course, the cultural prototype of the Puerto Rican, by now more symbol than reality. The many studies of New York Puerto Ricans similarly point to the diversity of types and degrees of adaptation and accommodation to the mainland culture depending on the migrant's background and the particularities of his experience in New York. The New York studies have had to face the further complication of weeding out in observations those elements that are expressive of distinctively Puerto Rican patterns and those that are merely a part of urban slum life in America.

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[16]Glazer, Nathan and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT/Harvard University Press, 1963.

[17]Steward, Julian, op.cit., p. 490 ff.

The exodus to New York, as has been seen, was fed by only modest hopes. Whatever bouyancy the prospect of change inspired was quickly tempered by the plunge into a new world of poverty with a life-shaping force of its own.[18] To a people accustomed to glossing over social differences, the poverty of the city seemed at once more stark and pitiless than that to which they were inured. Withal the migrants streamed with reasonable good cheer into the crumbling tenements, subways, factory workrooms, the subterranean hives of the city's hotels, the steaming kitchens and laundries. The faces, the setting, and the rules of the game were new but the taste of inequality was not unfamiliar. Lacking the defenses of the mainland poor, the migrants became the favored game of rent gougers, sweatshops operators, union racketeers, the purveyors of easy credit. The detachment and isolation from the larger society that the slum promoted was compounded by the cultural barrier. A distance of a few blocks along any East side avenue, say between 100th Street and the low 80's, was for a time as great as the distance between any San Juan barrio and Sutton Place.

The initial instinctive self-encapsulation in fact soon broke--in the short span of some twenty years Puerto Ricans fanned out into every corner of the city and its principal suburbs. But the only context in which Puerto Rican life in the city has been systematically observed is in fusion with the city's slum culture. Is anything authentically Puerto Rican surviving in that fusion or is the external show of ethnicity in the slum merely a defensive apparatus that is shed on escape or will disappear with the elimination of poverty? One observer has alleged that Negro identity won't survive five minutes after oppression is ended, that all those things that are associated with Negro folk culture are merely devices for making imposed deprivation and inferiority more tolerable.[19] The implication, of course, is that Negro Americans are only poor Americans with black faces, that the culture of the Negro who throws off poverty is that of white America. How much truth is there in such statements? Can the same be said about Puerto Ricans in the city? The U.S. experience has thrown the validity and usefulness of island values and identifications bluntly into question in myriad ways. Is there such a thing as a Puerto Rican community in New York City? Can New Yorkers hope that it will disappear?

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[18] A strong case for the existence of an "autonomous" non-ethnically determined class culture of the poor, which he designates the "peer group society" is made by Herbert J. Gans in The Urban Villagers, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962. Refer also to Dwight Mac Donald, "Our Invisible Poor," The New Yorker, January 19, 1963, pp. 82-132.

[19] Bradford, Daniel, Black, White and Gray, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962, p. 202 (interview with James Baldwin).

The most powerful single element serving to keep the ethnic identification alive on the mainland is clearly language, although, as many Puerto Ricans know, it is not absolutely indispensable. That is, there are many young Puerto Ricans in the city who have only a halting knowledge of Spanish yet feel keenly the Puerto Rican identification. The generally modest educational level of migrant parents does not equip them to pass on to youngsters more than a heavily class-marked, spoken knowledge of Spanish and a strongly sentimentalized and selective image of the island's past and traditions. The range, variety, and richness--past and potential--of the cultural world to which he is partial heir is closed to the child. The young Puerto Rican, whether born here or on the island, who takes the major part of his schooling on the mainland, is rarely equipped to carry on more than the simple amenities in Spanish, and that awkwardly. Unfortunately, New York City schools in depressed neighborhoods produce few of any ethnic background who are able to speak and write English well, so that the pupil only exchanges one imperfectly known language for another. Spanish tends to fall into disuse among migrant children and second and third generation Puerto Ricans because with the passage of time it has a more and more circumscribed part in everyday life.[20] Spanish is not the language of intellectual discourse among young Puerto Ricans because there is no tradition or framework for such activity in Spanish here. Though New York is the mass communications capital of the world, the Spanish language press and the radio serving the community would be classed as second-rate in many cities of modest size in Latin America. Other cultural activities in Spanish are so sporadic, unpredictable in quality, and poorly publicized that it requires a fanatic zeal to sustain an interest in them.

Yet strong counter pressures are already acting, particularly on the young, emergent leadership not fluent in Spanish. Puerto Ricans in the mass may not possess a high level of literary cultivation, but they are sensitive to signs of illiteracy in their leaders. Island political oratory is no doubt as stale and hackneyed as that of New York politicians, but it has a style, ornateness, and polish that require a reasonably command of language. Because the Puerto Rican migration unlike other influxes into the city of non-English speaking peoples has no natural or legally enforceable cut-off point, there is no prospect of eliminating this need for a genuinely bi-lingual leadership. Parallel pressures toward gaining English fluency act on the leadership of more traditional

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[20] A key factor in the perpetuation of Spanish as the main language of discourse in the family is the presence of grandparents. Where the grandparent is absent, children gradually impose English or some mixture of the two languages on the parents.

type organizations that flourish among the more recent arrivals. The fact is that Puerto Ricans in New York have now reached a point at which they need to be bi-lingual not to maintain ties with the larger community but in order to talk to each other.

Diet is another powerful and often overlooked factor cementing ethnic solidarity in the city. Many young Puerto Ricans would be unable to recognize in their tropical habitat fruits, vegetables, and spices that they have been eating all their lives and would miss keenly if they suddenly became unavailable. The substantial group of small businessmen within the Puerto Rican community has its main base in the servicing of this ethnically sustained and sustaining appetite for a particular range of tropical foodstuffs.

Music and the love of dancing are further unifying traits. The last of these, especially, is one way in which the culture holds its grip on the young, even against the competition of rock 'n' roll. Even a little rudimentary socialization is achieved through the medium of popular songs, for island music, along with that of other Latin American countries that contribute to the common stock, covers an amazing range of themes and frequently assumes a morally didactic tone. For many of the young the language of the popular song is the most sophisticated model of Spanish usage and social commentary available on problems of love, matrimony, paternity, filial duty, heterosexual play, politics, and patriotism. Other songs, in a more ribald vein, offer advice on strategies for dealing with landlords, policemen, welfare investigators, and over-Americanized Puerto Ricans. Heroically glorified but nevertheless moving tributes to the beauty of the island, the simple and honest pleasures of life there, and commemorations of salient past events also figure prominently in past and current song production. Because some Latin American rhythms have become extremely popular on the mainland and most non-Latins prove somewhat inept in grasping the more refined nuances of movement and timing that Puerto Ricans absorb from childhood, the importance, as a mark of ethnicity, of dancing to island and Latin music generally has been magnified. It enlarges the field of experiences that are perceived as expressive of a private, group capacity for immediate and shared understanding and response.

Family patterns, though under severe assault probably as much on the island as in the New York setting, still contribute unifying elements. Most Puerto Ricans have been raised in homes where grandparents on one or both sides were

present or nearby. Parents, by and large, still expect to live with the family of one or another of their children after these have reached marrying age. In many cases, young couples begin married life in the homes of parents. These patterns are all breaking down to some extent but the experience of most Puerto Ricans and their offspring in the city is still within this protective, extended network of kinship. The sense of mutual obligation to relatives, the frequent exchange of visits, and the ceremonial comings together for baptisms, weddings, and funerals remains typical. Many who lack blood kinship units of their own attach themselves to other families in order to partake in this round of family based conviviality.

More vulnerable to change has been the difinition of roles within the family, with the male suffering a sharp curtailment of former privileges and dominance. In keeping with Spanish tradition Puerto Rican culture prescribes for the woman chastity, fidelity, and only mild interest in and rudimentary knowledge of sex.[21] These prescriptions for the female have not been relaxed. What is disappearing is the broad tolerance with which male sexual assertiveness both within and outside marriage was viewed in the past. Even today a woman whose husband strays but still maintains his home and supports his children may be thought to have only small cause for complaint, but her efforts to curb the husband's exercise of privileges males once took for granted are now accorded substantial legitimacy.

This realignment of male-female roles in the Puerto Rican family is frequently attributed to the fact that in some cases it is easier for women than men to find employment, especially in New York. The reversal of roles presumably undermines male authority in the family generally. Some women do in fact find employment more readily than men, and there are signs that women are moving faster into white collar and other higher status jobs than men. The demoralization of male family heads through prolonged unemployment or underemployment is a serious source of strain in the family. However, it should not draw attention entirely away from a more general, independent trend toward more equalitarian relationships between husbands and wives. The changing status of women does not really rest primarily on their assuming the role of breadwinner. Equally and perhaps more important are changes in the self-concept of women, the availability

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[21] Seda-Bonilla, Edwin, The Normative Patterns of the Puerto Rican Family in Various Situational Contexts, Ph.D Thesis, Columbia University, 1958. (On microfilm in New York Public Library.)

of more assertive models of female behavior, and the support of public sentiment as well as law.

Paternal authority is probably undercut and countered more effectively and more meaningfully in other spheres of family life, for few married women challenge the double standard insofar as it defines their own responsibilities. Most Puerto Rican women are far more concerned with the future of children and keeping a family together than with vindicating equal rights in the sphere of sex. But the natural rebels in a family system that prescribes for the male head complete respect, prompt and unquestioning obedience, and generous services are the women and children. The many sources of new power for the woman in the family have already been mentioned. The restraint and understanding that women may show in exercising such new power is, however, less to be expected from children and adolescents. Migrant children are by early adolescence in almost every case better educated than their parents, better able to deal with many aspects of the New York environment, and at least theoretically, preparing for higher status occupations than their fathers. The Puerto Rican adolescent in this situation has at once greater power in the family and a greater sense of the inadequacy of the parent in helping him make to advantage crucial decisions about schooling and jobs, or in even understanding the existent blocks to opportunities or the opportunities themselves. The best that the largest number of fathers will be able to offer as a life model is a record of long years of hard and honest work at low wages in a series of menial or semi-skilled jobs--the very things that all American education teaches the child to scorn and reject. This is a focal point of stress even in whole or surfacely "non-problem" Puerto Rican families because it is also linked to an underlying and culturally rooted conflict about self-image that tends to divide generations.

This conflict gravitates around a concept that in Puerto Rico tends to be called dignidad and in Spain and other Hispanic countries is sometimes called pundonor. The idea of dignidad is often explained as the display of a decent regard for the dignity of the individual regardless of his social position. The notion is more graphically conveyed for those used to thinking about social status in U.S. terms as a fanatic, individual conviction of self-worth that simply overrides the realities of social discriminations and disadvantage. A rather long quotation from a study of island stratification by a U.S. scholar will help to clarify what is meant:

> "There is great disparity between the objective conditions of life under which many of the poorer folk live and the subjective evaluation of the adequacy of that life by these folk. This can be put in terms of an apparent paradox. There are sharp and considerable objective inequalities and equally strong denials of the significance of these inequalities so far as respect from others, dignity, and self-respect are concerned. The poor people of Puerto Rico seem to be unquestionably aware of their disadvantaged positions as measured by education, occupation, and income. They act, however, as if these objective indices of social position had little or nothing to do with social worthiness. There is, moreover, some evidence that those with higher incomes, education, and occupations agree in surprising measure with the poorer folk that differences in life's resources and comforts, so far as the immediate and ultimate worth of a man is concerned, are relatively unimportant."[22] (Italics added.)

This kind of obsessive pride and conviction of inner integrity and value that to the outsider appears as insensitive to social facts has subtle repercussions in many forms of behavior. From the above quotation it would sound like a remarkably efficient device for imposing and painlessly maintaining a system of inequality and domination. Seda notes in connection with dignidad that Puerto Ricans give deference to authority but expect personalized respect in return.[23] In point of fact dignidad also leads to rebelliousness over trivial or imagined slights to personal honor. It is more than just a manner of deluding the exploited into imagining they have some basis for self-esteem, for high status Puerto Ricans are also led into apparently self-defeating behavior by considerations of dignidad. Yet another study documents how Puerto Rican business men continue practices that are plainly uneconomical according to U.S. canons of entrepreneurship because of a preoccupation with protecting their individuality or personal integrity.[24] With respect to the inter-generational conflict in

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[22]Tumin, Melvin, Social Class and Social Change in Puerto Rico, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 452.

[23]Seda-Bonilla, Edwin, op. cit.

[24]Cochran, Thomas, C., The Puerto Rican Businessman: A Study in Cultural Change, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959, especially chapters VI and VIII.

Puerto Rican families cited earlier the point is, of course, that Puerto Rican youth brought up in the city neither have this kind of inner security nor have they escaped the submissiveness or aimless rebelliousness to which it sometimes leads their elders.

This individual, inner conviction of worth or dignidad seems to psychologically insulate Puerto Ricans to some extent from the social realities of mainland prejudice. Although Puerto Ricans recognize that prejudice against them exists, they apparently tend to perceive less prejudice than is actually directed against them.[25] City and state agencies dealing with discriminatory practices and other problems of intergroup relations, report few complaints on this score from Puerto Ricans even though other evidence suggests that a selectivity which bars Puerto Ricans along with other minorities from certain types of employment is being practiced. The passivity of Puerto Ricans on civil rights issues, their failure to join with Negroes and liberal whites in protest movements, and their apparent reluctance to realistically confront personal incidents of discrimination have provoked sardonic comment from both white and Negro mainlanders. The ordinary interpretation has been that although a substantial proportion of Puerto Ricans are Negro by mainland standards, they are so busy trying to disassociate themselves from non-Puerto Rican Negroes that they will suffer almost any indignity rather than confess publicly that they are the object of racial prejudice. The substance of this interpretation is probably correct; it falls short of the truth because it is expressed in stateside terms of racial morality including beliefs about the proper means of obtaining redress for racial grievances.

In Puerto Rico as in all of the world developed and dominated by occidentals it is for the moment unquestionably better to be white than to be black. As in other areas colonized by the Spanish there was from the start a high degree of racial mixture which has continued in an easy-going fashion for more than five hundred years. According to the censuses more than three-fourths of the Island population is white and the remainder of mixed origin or Negro. The proportion of visibly Negroid or Negro islanders is said to be steadily diminishing. The apparent whimsies of Puerto Rican racial classification,

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[25]Institute for Research in Human Relations, Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, April, 1954.

however, have always troubled the statistical purists who play with racial data and there has been some reluctance to group Puerto Rican whites even numerically with white continentals or to accept census estimates of the over-all proportion of whites. This has led to some defensiveness among island whites, a few of whom have occasionally claimed to be just as prejudiced at bottom as any occidental as a way of demonstrating their non-Africanness.[26] Most, however, have been satisfied merely to stipulate that the fact that Puerto Ricans are not as prejudiced as continentals should not be taken as prima facie evidence that all Puerto Ricans are part Negro. Racial prejudice on the island, as among Puerto Ricans in New York, tends to find expression chiefly among groups that pretend to middle-upper or upper class status, is individualized rather than programmatic, and affects primarily informal social contacts. Even at these levels doctrinaire positions on race tend to be regarded as petty or ridiculous. Nevertheless, being black is a social burden, and the net effect has not been much different than in other societies that make strong claims to racial democracy. The Negroes are not alone among the poor, but they are almost all there.[27]

Because prejudice has taken these more subtle and personal forms, there has been no organized body of custom or practice for Negroes to range themselves against. Because social discriminations seem to work with almost equal force against lower class individuals without much regard for color and because color lines are in fact remarkably fluid, there has been no basis for open conflict along hard racial lines. Puerto Ricans, white or Negro, have little comprehension of or experience with the deep racial animosities that divide mainland Americans and are understandably reluctant to become part of a fight that is to them ugly and meaningless. The behavior on race issues of Puerto Ricans in New York seems incomprehensible, ludicrous, or cowardly to mainlanders because they interpret it within the framework of their own particular kind of racial madness. They expect white Puerto Ricans to align themselves on one side and colored Puerto Ricans to become U.S. Negroes. Like the city's subway riders who are exhorted by posters to worship at any church but worship somewhere, Puerto Ricans are pressured to embrace one racial identity or another.

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[26]Blanco, Tomás, "El prejuicio social en Puerto Rico," Estudios Afrocubanos, La Habana, Vol. II, No. 1, 1938.

[27]Bonilla, Frank, "Rio's Favelas: The Rural Slum Within the City," American Universities Field Staff Report, East Coast South America Series, No. 1961.

Since mainlanders don't really believe that even the imperfect integration of white and black achieved by Puerto Ricans is really possible, they ridicule the idea that Negro Puerto Ricans might feel more at home with other Puerto Ricans, regardless of color, than with Negroes of another culture.

Another common observation on this score has been that in New York, Puerto Ricans who are Negro or of mixed background cling to the Puerto Rican identification, while white Puerto Ricans seek to shake the ethnic tie. Such defections by whites are seen primarily as a problem for the Puerto Rican community, which is said to be drained of its better elements in this fashion. White Puerto Ricans are undoubtedly accommodated more readily into mainland life; they also learn new forms of prejudice and sometimes come to deprecate their own origins. But there is also much evidence that white Puerto Ricans are as much bound to the island by cultural and sentimental ties as other Puerto Ricans. There is little basis for believing that what is surviving of island tradition in New York or is taking shape as a New York expression of Puerto Ricanness will live only, or even primarily for Negro Puerto Ricans.

With respect to the conspicuous Puerto Ricanness of the more visibly Negro, resentment has come to a great extent from the mainland Negroes. Puerto Ricans, they say, came later and are treated better even if they are black; dark-skinned Puerto Ricans refuse to be Negroes. The first of these affirmations is explained by the paradoxical fact that prejudice in the United States has always been most inflexible against the native black. As Langston Hughes' Simple has remarked, "Español...is a language which, if you speak it, will take some of the black off of you if you are colored."[28] As to the second point, as has already been noted, there is an understandable lack of enthusiasm among Puerto Ricans to accept an identity which is alien to them and exposes them to insane prejudices.

The lamentable fact is not that more Puerto Ricans have not accepted the rigid mainland rules that define race relations, but that Puerto Ricans as a group have contributed little to the civil rights struggle. The non-militancy of Puerto Ricans stems from many sources, few of them rational. The very structure of New York organizational and political life inhibits effective collaboration between Negro and Puerto Rican groups. The main point is not to look simply

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[28]Hughes, Langston, Simple Stakes a Claim, New York: Rinehart, 1953, p. 74.

to racial affinities for a basis of common purpose. This will come only through the shared experience of dealing with common problems as Puerto Ricans awaken to the fact that they are even more than mainland Negroes the victims of discrimination in many aspects of life in the city. As the two groups gain in self-confidence and the penalties and risks of being together are diminished, a more realistic, working unity will be attainable. Whatever the future of relations between Puerto Ricans and Negroes in New York, the political successes and moral impact of Negro protest will accentuate the tendency to structure all efforts for reform and change along ethnic lines.[29]

The foregoing sketch, brief and selective as it is, sets out the main contours of the cultural base of community unity for Puerto Ricans in the city. That cultural base has some roots in the island but already has achieved an authentic New York cast. It is increasingly bi-lingual and committed to working out a future in the city. All of its main elements are being lastingly modified by the experience in the city. Because the flow of migration from the island will continue, the process of adaptation and change will not lead to a simple absorption of that culture into some generic city lifestream. However, even if the flow of migration were not expected to continue, the city's experience with other groups and the present climate of militant protest and reform suggest that the Puerto Rican identification is likely to take on greater meaning in the years to come. This changing but distinctive ethnic sub-culture is a central fact in the lives of a substantial proportion of the city's low-income families. The only basis for identifying a Puerto Rican community is cultural--Puerto Ricans do not live in any one place in the city, they are not a race, they have many religions, they are technically not even a nationality. The argument here is not about the high achievement, excellence, or glorious tradition of Puerto Rican culture. The argument is simply that the Puerto Rican identity is a vital and enduring organizing principle in the lives of many of the city's poor. Any program of action that seriously undertakes to mobilize these individuals to fight against conditions that presently limit their lives must work on and through this ethnically determined system. Such a step is by no means an innovation in the city's life. It is but a logical extension into the context of new forms of governmental action against poverty of the lessons provided by observing the process of integration of earlier migrant groups.

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[29]Handlin, Oscar, The Newcomers, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959, p. 69.